

**Lost Opportunities and Wasted Skills:
Learning Experiences of Apprentices and their Attrition**

Portfolio

Richard McDermott

**Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education**

**Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences
University of Technology Sydney
2013**

Certificate of Original Authorship

I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree except as fully acknowledged within the text.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

Signature of Student:

Date:

Acknowledgments

I would like to acknowledge the support of all participants who contributed to this research by answering my questions. Their knowledge and experience of the industry and vocational education and training has produced a rich document on key elements of commercial cookery apprentices' work and learning. I particularly thank the apprentices who agreed to talk to me for their willingness, candour and insights into their work and learning. Furthermore, I am grateful for the support of Michael Bennett as Head of a Group training Organisation in Sydney and his dedicated team for their assistance in this research. I am also appreciative that Warrant Officer Col McKenzie of the Royal Australian Navy allowed me to talk to chefs on HMAS Kuttabul and HMAS Watsons Bay and for his support in this research. I wish to further acknowledge the TAFE NSW - Sydney Institute, Ultimo College and my fellow teachers for their feedback on so many of the points I raised with them concerning apprentices' retention.

I am also pleased that my principal supervisor Dr Tony Holland retained his goodwill towards me during my efforts to come to grips with this portfolio research and doctoral writing. His patience and experience helped me greatly though the many years of this 'Doctoral' journey at UTS. Furthermore my secondary supervisor Dr Ann Reich performed a central role in the final stages of this research through her astute but ever kindly critical analysis of my research and writing. My other 'critical friend', Rosalind Carter was invaluable for her keen eyes and ever worthwhile suggestions as was my dear friend Megan McDonald who provided experience and knowledge with regard to my academic writing. Finally I also would like to thank AVETRA and NCVER for giving me the opportunity to present papers on my research findings and the warmth and collegial support of AVETRA members. They were always willing to assist with helpful advice for a novice researcher, such as myself. The research has been expertly edited by a professional editor Dr Guenter A. Plum who provided copyediting services, according to the guidelines laid out in the university-endorsed national guidelines: 'The editing of research theses by professional editors'.

Portfolio Structure

This portfolio consists of a meta-statement and seven artefacts, each with their own page numbers, table of contents and references. It is an assembly of distinct artefacts, written for multiple audiences connected by the Research Study and bound as a single thesis. Each artefact has been separated by a coloured page to delineate it from the following artefact for ease of retrieval and reference. After much deliberation the final structure of this portfolio is offered as the clearest solution to a composite research study.

Portfolio Table of Contents

Certificate of Original Authorship.....	ii
Acknowledgements.....	iii
Portfolio Structure.....	iv
Portfolio Table of Contents.....	v
Glossary of Terms used in this Portfolio.....	vi
Meta-statement	
Artefact 1 The Research Study	
Artefact 2 Stage One Report: Industry and VET	
Artefact 3 Wasted Skills: The hospitality industry and its young chefs	
Artefact 4 Learning in the Workplace: Who’s Doing the Teaching	
Artefact 5 A Recipe for Change: Managing the Learning of Trainee / Apprentice Chefs at Work	
Artefact 6 Stage Two Report: Industry and VET	
Artefact 7 Motivating Apprentice Chefs to Stay the Course: Understanding Expectations	

Glossary of Terms used in this Portfolio

ABS: Australian Bureau of Statistics

ACCI: Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry

ACTU: Australian Council of Trade Unions

AVETRA: Australian Vocational Education and Training Research Association

CBT: Competency Based Training

CEO: Chief Executive Officer

DEEWR: Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations

GTO: Group Training Organisation

MCEETYA: Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs

MCVTE: Ministerial Council for Vocational and Technical Education

MEGT: Trade name for Group Training Organisation; Melbourne East Group Training

NCVER: National Centre for Vocational and Education Research

OECD: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

R&CA: Restaurant and Catering Association

RTO: Registered Training Organisation

TAFE: Technical and Further Education

TVET: TAFE delivered Vocational Education and Training

VET: Vocational Education and Training

Meta-statement

Table of Contents

Table of Contents	viv
List of Figures.....	x
Abstract	xi
Chapter One – The Portfolio	1
1.0 Introduction.....	1
1.1 The Meta-statement	3
1.2 The portfolio artefacts.....	6
Introduction	6
Artefact A.1 – The Research Study.....	10
Artefact A.2 – Stage One industry and VET report	10
Artefact A.3 – Wasted skills: The hospitality industry and its young chefs (http://hdl.voced.edu.au/10707/97900).....	11
Artefact A.4 – Learning in the workplace: Who’s doing the teaching? (http://hdl.voced.edu.au/10707/132256).....	11
Artefact A.5 – A Recipe for Change: Managing the learning of Trainee/Apprentice Chefs at work (http://hdl.voced.edu.au/10707/47961 ; co-authored with Rosalind Carter).....	12
Artefact A.6– Stage Two industry and VET report.....	13
Artefact A.7 – Motivating Apprentice Chefs to Stay the Course: Understanding Expectations (http://hdl.voced.edu.au/10707/5381).....	13
1.3 Rationale for the research	14
1.4 Context.....	16
Catering in Australia.....	16
Significance of the hospitality industry	18
Attrition in the trade	19
The cost to VET and industry.....	21
Trades are poorly served.....	22
Changes to VET in Australia.....	22
Generational changes and expectations.....	23
Chapter Two – A Selective Review of the Literature	25
2.0 Introduction.....	25
2.1 VET research on apprenticeships.....	26
2.2 Workplace learning research.....	30
2.3 Motivation Research	35
2.4 Conclusion	38
Chapter Three – Methodology.....	39
3.0 Introduction.....	39
3.1 Methodology for the stage one research	41
3.2 Methodology for the stage two research.....	43
3.3 Limitations of the methodology.....	46
3.4 Conclusion	46
Chapter Four – Findings.....	48
4.0 Introduction.....	48
4.1 Attrition and its causes.....	48
Stage one findings found to have contributed to attrition.....	48
Wages	50
Conditions of employment	51

4.2 Retention: Voices of the Stayers.....	53
Stage two findings found to have contributed to retention.....	53
Expectations and motivation to stay.....	54
Disposition to cope with the job.....	57
Enriched work practices.....	61
4.3 Learning and Learning Support.....	67
Mentoring.....	68
Training and support.....	71
Training others.....	75
4.4 Factors limiting learning support.....	77
Menial Tasks.....	77
No time to train.....	78
Pre-prepared food products.....	79
Relationship between apprentice and workplace.....	80
Chapter Five – Conclusion.....	83
5.0 Introduction.....	83
5.1 Uniqueness of this research.....	85
5.2 Significance and contribution.....	86
5.3 Recommendations for further research.....	88
References.....	90

List of Figures

Fig. 1:	Portfolio artefacts: locations and links to each other	8
Fig. 2:	Portfolio artefacts: description, purpose and audience.....	9
Fig. 3:	Employment in cafes, restaurants and caterers across Australia, R&CA 2010	17
Fig. 4:	Employment classification: cafes, restaurants and caterers in Australia R&CA 2010	18
Fig. 5:	Schematic of methodology and research progression of this study.....	40
Fig. 6:	Stage one participant interview table.....	43
Fig. 7:	Stage two participant interview table.....	45

Abstract

The rate of attrition of apprentices failing to complete their apprenticeship and dropping out of a trade altogether has long been a concern for both industry and government (DEEWR 2008; Knight & Karmel 2011). Attrition amongst commercial cookery apprentices is one of the highest, where more than 60% leave within their first year. Low pay and unsociable hours have often been cited as reasons why many apprentices reassess their career choice (Pratten 2003a; Pratten & O’Leary 2007). However while these conditions are difficult to change, many apprentice chefs leave through poor treatment and the lack of opportunity for learning, rather than the physical demands of the job. The purpose of this study is to investigate learning opportunities for apprentice chefs and their influence on retention. This study further examines the inter-relational dynamics of enriched work practices and learning and its influence on apprentices’ motivation.

Apprentices will bring expectations to their apprenticeship from sources external to their workplace and VET. These sources may be from programs on television and the internet (Bonsal 2007), school VET programs (Smith & Wilson 2002a, 2002b) or weekend casual work in local restaurants (Fuller & Unwin 2004; Hodgson & Spours 2001). The origin of these expectations may be an idealised notion of what it means to be a chef but a prevailing motivation to cook for a living. This study examines what motivates apprentices to complete their apprenticeship and qualify in a very challenging industry.

Two stages were developed in this investigation where the findings of the first stage informed the progression to the second. Stage one investigates apprentices’ motivation and attrition from a broad spectrum of industry stakeholders where qualitative data was collected in order to gain insight into the viewpoints of key individuals. *The Stage One Report Industry and VET* was disseminated in order to seek feedback and enrich the data. Conference papers presented during the study also acted as conduits for feedback. Stage two then progresses the study through interviews with successfully qualified apprentices and their nominated mentors to capture the voices and perceptions at the core of this problem. *The Stage Two Report Industry and VET* was published and disseminated for feedback, again to enrich the data together with a final conference paper. The resultant findings present evidence of generational shifts in apprentices’ expectations of their learning and work practices in the workplace. The sociological implications for workplace reform may require effective industry and VET changes for the next generation of apprentices. Recommendations have been generated for the industry and VET to apply in practice for the retention of apprentices.